

A System to Document and Address Microaggressions at Gillings School Of Global Public Health

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Major recommendations

- (1) To institutionalize a system within Gillings to report, document and respond to Gillings' student, faculty, and staff incidents of bias and microaggressions.
- (2) To identify and establish leadership/personnel within Gillings who are trained and prepared to respond to and mediate bias and microaggression incidents in the Gillings community.
- (3) To create transparency around the number and types of occurrences of bias and microaggression incidents and report this data annually to the Gillings community to foster accountability to prevent further incidents.

Background

Racial microaggressions have been defined as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color” (Sue et al., 2007). Racial microaggressions have also been documented to have negative impacts on health, specifically mental health (Nadal, Griffin, Wong, Hamit, & Rasmus, 2014). Racial microaggressions may contribute to health disparities by increasing allostatic load (Geronimus et al., 2006) Experiences of microaggressions in higher education negatively impact campus climate (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). As such confronting microaggressions, is one part of the larger project of dismantling institutional racism.

Faculty, staff, and students have expressed concerns about knowing how to identify and address microaggressions. In these two resources, Derald Wing Sue identifies examples of microaggressions related to race, gender, sexual orientation, and national origin, among others, in this educational [tool](#) and gives common examples of microaggressions in the classroom in this [handout](#).

Feedback

Students, staff, and faculty at Gillings School of Global Public Health have vocalized experiences with microaggressions in informal conversations, university-facilitated forums, and written feedback. On April 10, 2019, 33 students, faculty, and staff in the school, mostly from the Department of Health Behavior, had a meeting to discuss microaggressions in the campus context and how to address them. During this meeting and through a survey conducted in the health behavior department beforehand, it was clear that students regularly experience microaggressions from faculty, staff, and other students. A variety of examples were

confidentiality shared related to race, class, sexual orientation. Students noted that faculty often conflate race and class, and they do not understand intersectionality, though they often use the term. Students also noted that faculty lack understanding of equity in the context of health behavior and skills to discuss race. Students pointed out the bias introduced when so much of the readings included in public health curricula comes from white men and emphasized the need to decolonize syllabi. Students also requested to see more faculty of color and for faculty of color to teach courses that graduate students take.

Faculty reported not feeling confident or prepared to identify or address microaggressions in the moment and requested additional support and training to increase their skills. It was also clear that microaggressions were a problem within the larger school, and that both faculty and students were interested in action to address this issue. The faculty requested role play and specific examples of scenarios to learn how to respond to microaggressions both immediately after and after some time has passed since the incident. They also requested language and toolkits that they can reference when considering how to handle a particular situation. However, Gillings' ability to address these issues is constrained by a lack of reporting and accountability structure as well as a lack of training for faculty, staff, and students about how to identify and address microaggressions.

Progress

As a follow-up to the Health Behavior Inclusion Meet Up meeting, a subset of students met with the Assistant to the Chair to develop and draft a proposal to address the issues of bias and microaggressions within the Department of Health Behavior. This included a meeting with Adrienne M. B. Davis, MPA the Associate Director of the Campus Community Centers at the North Carolina State University which includes the direction of the [Bias Impact Response Team](#) (BIRT) housed within the Office for Institutional Equity and Diversity at NCSU. We believe that this proposal fits well within the aims of the Inclusive Excellence Action Plan, which has similar overall goals of creating a more inclusive campus environment.

Examples of Systems

- I. The MPH CORE feedback form (available here: <http://go.unc.edu/mphcorefeedback>) was a tool monitored by MPH CORE professors that included feedback about bias incidents occurring in MPH CORE lectures and discussions. It allowed for anonymous submissions, live/on-going monitoring, and immediate or up-to-date response. However, responses were not shared with students, there was no student input on response protocol, and it was unclear who was checking survey responses. Students had no clarity on the utility of feedback to improve the MPH CORE, they did not know who to approach within the CORE leadership to address feedback accountability concerns, and students expressed frustration in feeling like feedback submissions were not addressed in a timely or productive manner. Furthermore, this tool was specifically designed to address issues, both related to bias and curricula, in the MPH Core and not relevant to

the broader Gillings community. The MPH CORE feedback form is a good starting point for what the bias and microaggression system could look like and is useful in demonstrating students' receptivity to using an online reporting system. The MPH CORE form was distributed widely via email, pinned on Sakai, and regularly announced in-class by professors so that students were encouraged and reminded to submit as issues became present. The form was easy to use and the questions were an appropriate length that allowed for anonymous submissions or self-disclosure for students who wanted directed follow-up.

- II. A more action-oriented system to report and respond to bias and microaggressions within a campus community is currently exemplified by the [Bias Impact Response Team](#) (BIRT) at NC State. The university-wide, restorative-based bias incident reporting and response program is rooted in community building, anti-racism, and anti-bias principles. The Team has a BIRT Coordinator whose sole job on campus is to receive and respond to incidents of bias and conduct trainings to prevent these incidents from happening. This coordinator works within NC State's Office of Institutional Equity and Diversity and meets regularly with staff members from community cultural centers (GLBT Center, African American Cultural Center, Women's Center, Multicultural Student Affairs), Student Conduct, University Housing, and other campus partners to collaboratively address incidents. The incidents are aggregated and documented on an annual basis. The OIED's 2017-2018 Year in Review [report](#) includes some general information on the number of reports made and the kinds of follow-up actions taken.

Suggested Outcomes

Communicate and consult with stakeholders

1. Consolidating previous and current documentation of incidents of bias and microaggressions (August 2019)
2. Administration at Gillings delivers microaggression resources to all faculty, students, and staff in the school (targeting faculty meetings?) (August 2019)
 - a. Example: [tool](#) on *Recognizing Microaggressions and the Messages They Send*, or this [handout](#) which gives specific examples of microaggressions in the classroom
3. Consult students and community members on draft reporting systems for microaggressions

Establish a system

4. Establishing a reporting system for students, faculty, and staff to submit incidents of microaggressions (August 2019)
5. Gillings Administration appoints a paid staff member to be "BIRT Coordinator"
6. Present new system to students and faculty at appropriate meetings
7. Gillings "BIRT Coordinator" reads and responds to requests for action (within one week of receiving a report)

Use system to document and improve culture

8. Gillings “BIRT Coordinator” compiles aggregate data on submitted incidents from the academic year and publishes a report that is transparent to the Gillings community (May 2020)
9. Create module for COMPASS for incoming students in 2020 that explains microaggressions, responding to microaggressions, and the reporting system

Proposed Process

All response fields in the reporting system should be optional to fill out. The first section should include information on the person’s name, affiliation with Gillings, contact information, and whether or not the person is requesting action. There should also be an option for whether or not the person wants to be contacted. The next section of the form should capture the description of the incident, the behaviors or actions experienced or witnessed, and information on the people involved. It should also allow space for the person to indicate the identity(ies) or perceived identity(ies) that are relevant to the report. A detailed form used by the BIRT Coordinator at NC State is available [here](#). The process diagram included below illustrates the steps taken after a report is submitted.

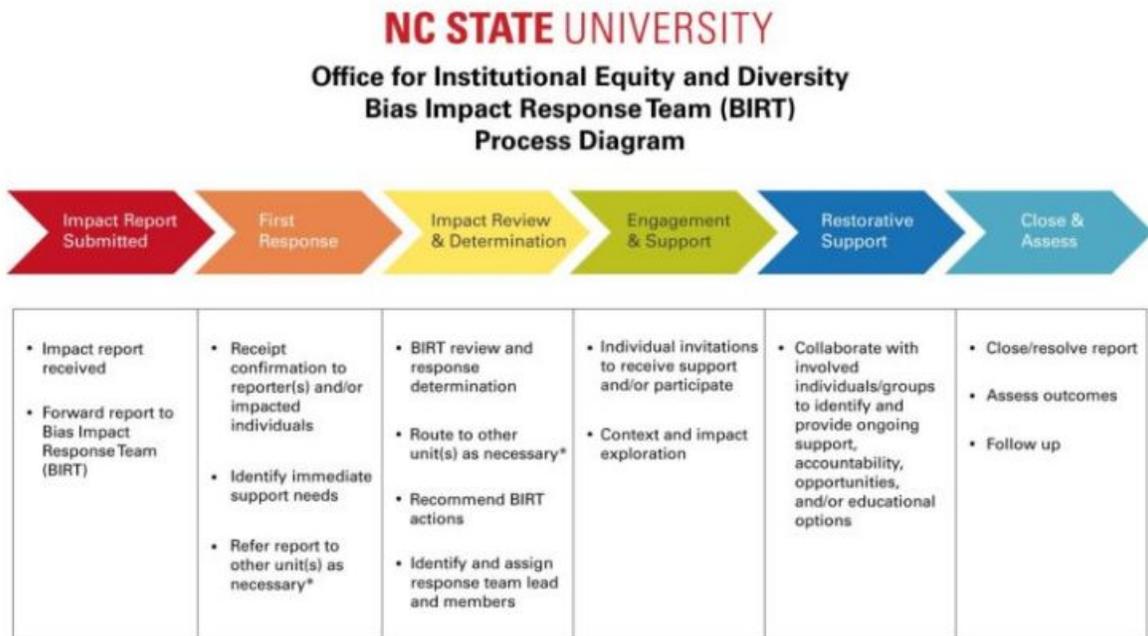


Photo from <https://bias-impact.ncsu.edu/submit-a-report/>

Future Directions

Establishing this reporting system at the Gillings School of Global Public Health may initially reveal a number of incidents that previously were hidden from view. With time, this tool will help track incidents of bias and guide appropriate response and prevention strategies. Eventually, this system will be more effective at the university-wide level.

References

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